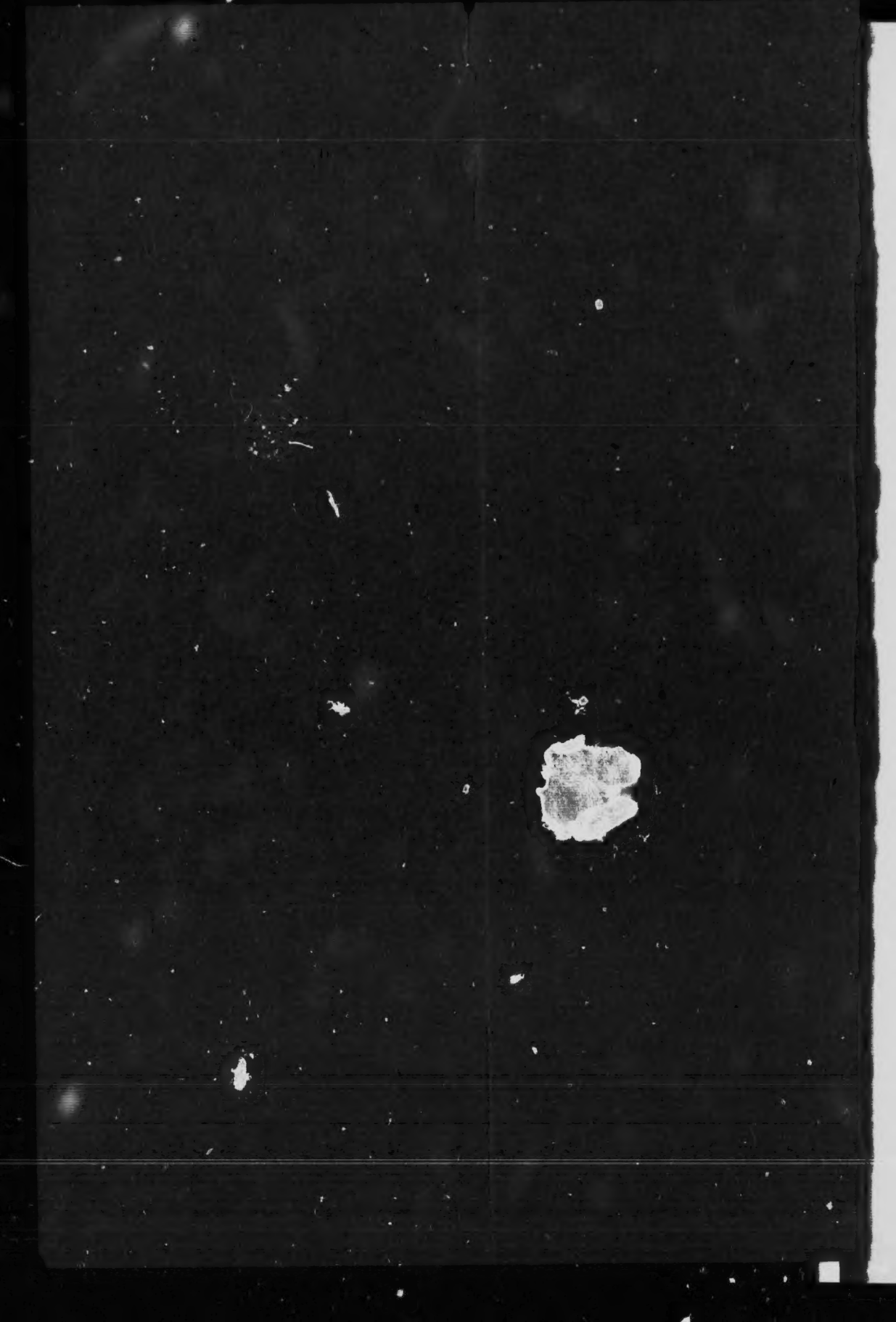


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**With the Infantry  
in South Africa**

BY COLONEL LAWRENCE BUCHAN, C. M. G.,  
*Commanding the Royal Canadian Regiment.*

**A Lecture Delivered at the Canadian Military Institute,  
3rd February, 1902.**



# WITH THE INFANTRY IN SOUTH AFRICA.\*

BY COLONEL LAWRENCE BUCHAN, C. M. G., COMMANDING THE  
ROYAL CANADIAN REGIMENT.

Mr. Chairman and Gentlemen,—In endeavouring to give you a lecture on the somewhat comprehensive subject which has been suggested to me for my remarks to-night, I fear that I have undertaken a task that I will be far from able to perform satisfactorily, either to you, or myself, and, further, I know that I have tackled a subject that I can scarcely do justice to in the brief course of one evening's talk. If I be able to hold your attention for one hour on the subject myself, I hope to raise points for consideration which will so draw out the ideas and counter ideas of those present that the discussion which follows the lecture may prove of much more interest to you than the lecture itself, as it certainly will be to me.

Before proceeding to relate incidents and scenes more directly connected with the subject of "With the Infantry in South Africa," I desire to make a few remarks upon the impressions that have been forced upon me by my experience in that campaign, as they also were, though less forcibly for many reasons, in the Canada North West Campaign of 1885, and the first and greatest is this :

## THE NECESSITY FOR PREPARATION.

I need not go into any account of the enormous waste of money, and the unnecessary loss of valuable lives, caused by the absolute lack of proper preparation to all branches of our military service and its concomitant requirements when that little unpleasantness suddenly broke out in March, 1885, in our own North West. That is long past and gone, but the lesson of "necessity for preparation" was not learned from our experience at that time.

It was plain to any observer of passing events that the day would again come when Canadians would be suddenly called upon to take up arms at some time, and to fight somewhere, on behalf of the Empire, if not in defence of our own firesides.

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\*A Lecture delivered at the Canadian Military Institute, 3rd February, 1902.

I have always been strongly convinced that such a day would come sooner or later, and I have lost no opportunity to say so, in season and, peradventure, out of season, too.

At the Banquet of the Scottish Societies in London, Ont., on the 30th November, 1898, St. Andrew's Day, I was called upon to reply to the toast of the "Army, Navy and Auxiliary Forces." In doing so I took as my main theme the "necessity for preparation" by the Canadian Militia for service on behalf of the Empire in Canada or out of it. I stated then that the day was not far distant when Canada would be called upon to furnish thousands of men to help maintain the integrity of the Empire, either on our own shores against a possible invader, or elsewhere upon the seas. Well, gentlemen, whilst my remarks to that end were cheered by the majority of those present, it was apparent to me that some of the gentlemen, and prominent gentlemen, too, thought I was talking utter jingo rot, and so they told me afterwards. Well, they changed their minds not so very long after that evening, for on the next anniversary of that same day—St. Andrew's Day, 1899—the first Canadian Contingent disembarked on South African soil at Capetown—the first contingent of Canadians who had the very distinguished honor and privilege of going as a body outside of Canada to help keep the dear old flag waving where there appeared to be danger of its being lowered for a time.

It's an old but a very trite saying that "It's the unexpected that always happens." So it was in 1885, and in 1899, and so it will be again in some other year and in some other part of the Empire, and if Britain becomes involved in war with any of the first class European powers, all of whom the fleets of warships and of transports, which she certainly will some day, we here in Canada will have to be up and doing with a vengeance to defend our own shores and no mere 5,000 or 10,000 men will be able to do it either.

Now, gentlemen, having enlarged somewhat on the necessity for preparation in its broad and general sense, I will come down to particularize as to the branch of preparation I want more especially to lay stress upon. Any body of troops of one, two or all branches of the service should be prepared before taking the field as to the matter of arms, equipment, transport, supply, medical attendance and the like, but the preparation I most particularly want to speak of at this time is training. By training I mean, of course, drill in all its forms, knowledge of interior economy, of regimental duties, and, above all, amenability to discipline. Now, all drill as such, be it barrack square drill, ceremonial, field drill, battle formation, or what not, tends to discipline, and when you get a disciplined lot of men they are away

and above the undisciplined to an extent that no one who has not gone through the hardships and perils of an arduous campaign with both sorts can possibly appreciate. The work done by a trained and disciplined man in the fight, on the trek, in bivouac or in standing camp is out and away at all times superior in its character and results to that of the untrained and undisciplined man, and I firmly believe that had all the officers and men of the whole of the Canadian Contingents for South Africa been, as bodies, trained in the sense I speak of, very much better results than those excellent ones already achieved would have been to our credit.

It is, no doubt, something to be able to boast of that the first Contingent, called the 2nd S. S. Battalion of the Royal Canadian Regiment, consisting of 1,040, all told, should have been enlisted anywhere from Vancouver to Halifax, commencing on the 19th October and actually embarked and sailed on the 30th of the same month from Quebec, a complete unit numerically. But grand and all as was the spirit shown which enabled this much to be so quickly and fully accomplished, it was but then and from that time forward, as Colonel Otter full well knows, and as I and others know, that the training had to be begun and instilled into the minds of all, and that training meant everything the soldier ought to know, and then did not. Well, the work went bravely on on board ship, and by the time of our arrival in Capetown everything was much improved, but the exigencies of war would permit us no time to be spent in preparation there, so the very next day we entrained for the North. Arriving at De Aar about three o'clock on Sunday morning we detrained and pitched our tents on the arid sandy soil of that part of the country. It was on this day that we got our first-taste of what was going to be a mouthful, or many mouthfuls would better describe it, of an African dust storm. The weather was very hot, and the wind, which got up about 7 a. m., was hotter, and, like the time of the wreck of the "Julie Plante," "The wind she blew lak hurricane: by'me bye she blew some more." And to carry the comparison further with the poem, "The wind she blew from Nort', Eas', West; the South wind she blew too." The result of all this was that hundreds of tons of fine sand were picked up by these twisting winds and whirled about and cast back at you with a force that was at all times impossible to stand against. Eating, drinking, sleeping or smoking were out of the question that day till the wind stopped, about 9 p. m.

We had three days very useful training at De Aar, in fact it was the first opportunity we had of giving any practical drill to the Battalion since it had been brought together at Quebec. On Thursday, 7th, we went up by train to Orange River, and there, whilst pitching our tents in the evening, we had our first experience with a South



African thunderstorm, followed by the inevitable efflux from the wet, sandy soil, afterwards, of lizards, centipedes, scorpions, snakes and tarantulas. It was here that we relieved the 1st Gordon Highlanders, who had arrived at Capetown the same day as we did, but had gone straight up country from their ship. We were afterwards to be most intimately associated with that gallant battalion throughout the whole of our stay in South Africa. On the 9th and 10th we moved by half battalions to Belmont and went into camp, where we were destined to stay, with more or less interruption, for two months. It was during these two months that the battalion obtained the training and experience which led eventually to its being able to come so creditably through the campaign. Drill of all sorts was practised daily—battle formations, marching formations, ordinary formations, target practice at known and unknown distances, and everything in that line that could be thought possibly useful was gone through again and again. Outpost duties were very heavy, continuously, we being the only Infantry there for a while, and having a large perimeter to cover. This was varied at times by such expeditions as that of Colonel Pilcher to Sunnyside, where one of our companies first came under fire on New Year's day, and with some Queenslanders and Horse Artillery were instrumental in the capture of some 45 Dutchmen of all sorts. Subsequently, during the month of January, several of the companies were out on detached duty thereby gaining much valuable experience. It was whilst there at Belmont that we became intimately acquainted with the manners and customs of the South African ostrich. This festive bird was in much evidence there, and as tame as a barnyard fowl. He would wait about till you left your tent, and then with his long far-reaching, rubber neck and prehensile bill would pick out from under the uprolled tent curtain anything and everything that took his fancy as a dainty morsel, from the small pocket prayer-book to a cake of soap, a sponge, or a Lee-Enfield cartridge. These birds were a nuisance in other ways for they would wander afield at night and frequently scare the wits out of an outpost sentry by approaching him with stealthy steps through the darkness of the night, until, hearing no answer to his challenge, bang would go the rifle, and rare, very rare instances have been known in which he bagged his bird. On one of these lucky occasions I was fortunate enough to get hold of a hind quarter, and I assure you, as cooked by a Kaffir girl, it was a most palatable and toothsome dish. During the last week of January and the early part of February large bodies of troops of all sorts were continuously passing up the line to stations between us and Modder River with train loads of supplies and warlike stores, and half of our battalion was moved up the line towards Graspan, only to return to

Belmont again, much chagrined at our not being "in it" and finding ourselves likely to be left on the line of communications, as we thought. Finally, on the 8th, it became rumoured that we were to be brigaded with some of "the finest." The outlying companies were called in and on Sunday the 11th we were inspected by Major-General Smith-Dorrien. On the next day we moved by train to Graspan and joined the 19th Brigade, the other three battalions being the 1st Gordon Highlanders of Dargai fame, the 2nd King's Shropshire Light Infantry, and the 1st Duke of Cornwall's Light Infantry, the brigade being commanded by Major-General G. L. Smith-Dorrien, D.S.O. We thus found ourselves in good company, under a leader second to none, and we were consequently much pleased. The other brigade in our division was the Highland Brigade, commanded by Major-General Hector Macdonald, "Fighting Mac," as he is familiarly spoken of. That brigade was composed of the 2nd Black Watch, 1st Highland Light Infantry, 2nd Seaforths, and 1st Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders, the whole division, known as the 9th, being under the command of Lieut.-General Sir Henry Colville. The army, which Lord Roberts now personally commanded for the march upon Bloemfontein, the Orange Free State capital, consisted of 9,550 cavalry under Lieut.-General French, 3,100 artillery with 100 guns, 26,530 infantry in 3 divisions—the 6th under Lieut.-General Kelly-Kenny, the 7th under Lieut.-General Tucker, and our own division, the 9th, under Sir Henry Colville. Ammunition columns, 700, making a grand total of close on 40,000. In addition to this force was the Naval Brigade with 2 4.7 gun and 2 naval 12-pounders. That is the army that marched toward Bloemfontein.

I intend now to confine my remarks principally to the doings of our own brigade, commencing with the start from Graspan at 4.30 a.m. on the 13th February. That first march was a most trying one. The heat was terrible, a thermometer hanging under an ambulance wagon showed 112; the soil was sandy and arid; there was no water and no shade en route, and to make matters worse we had to halt in that awful heat, with no shade, for three hours, to allow the transport, which had got stuck in the sand, to catch up. Marching or moving about under that terrible sun is nothing compared with the unpleasantness of being compelled to lie or stand about and wait. There were many cases of sunstroke that day. When we reached Ramdam, having covered 15 miles, men fought like wild beasts to get at the water. The march to Waterval Drift next day was also a very trying one on account of the terrific heat, but water was reached in the Reit River about noon and all revelled in it, dirty and all as it was. At the Drift 200 of the Royal Canadian Regiment got the big naval guns over in grand style, much to the admiration of Lord Roberts

and the numerous other less distinguished spectators. We were off again the next morning at four o'clock, reaching Wegdraai about nine o'clock. Here we first heard sounds of heavy firing, both to our front and rear, that to the front being the 7th division attacking Jacobsdal, and that to the rear being the Boer attack on our supply column, where, unfortunately, they captured 176 waggon-loads of our good grub, the consequences being that from that time on until we reached Bloemfontein on 15th March we mostly went hungry all the time.

This hunger naturally led the men to supplement the regular issue of what Tommy calls "chuck" by any means within his reach, and to let no opportunity pass of getting hold of anything in the way of fowl or beast that could be caught and speedily converted into food. It was very amusing at times to watch the efforts of the untrained Canadian to lay hold of the unsuspecting sheep, calf, goat or pig. If he ever caught it, it was only after a long and exhausting chase, whereas the skilled Highlander alongside of us would never disturb the equanimity of the flock or herd as the case might be, but, walking quietly by, in a trice he would have the animal by the legs and thrown across his neck. Off he would run to his bivouac and almost before you could say "knife" the pot and the fry pan or mess-tin would have chunks stewing or sizzling. That skill some people say comes from the predatory instinct of the race rather than from training. On one occasion one poor Canadian was, as he thought, lucky enough to lay hands on an innocent little chicken, but before he got 50 yards away with it, and whilst thinking of the choice and toothsome meal he was to enjoy that day, he was ruthlessly seized by a guard, compelled to drop the chicken, tried by a Field General Court Martial and awarded 60 days field imprisonment. You naturally say, why was this? Because, from lack of training, he allowed himself to be caught. All of which goes to show that the trained Tommy, be he of Scotch or of kindred blood, is a better man in the field for himself than the untrained Canadian.

The orders against looting were very severe, but more honoured in the breach than the observance at times. I recollect one morning as the column was moving out of its bivouac I saw the servants and cook of a distinguished general officer catching a pig, a turkey and some fowl. As he saw me watching the performance with, peradventure, an envious look on my face, he said: "You know I never tell my fellows to go and catch anything in that way, but if I happen to see a fowl or an animal that looks to have a turn of speed in it, I say to my fellows, 'Two to one on the turkey,' or whatever it may be, and of course their sporting instincts naturally lead them to take on a two to one shot without a moment's hesitation."



We marched into Jacobsdal next morning, finding many Boers wounded in the hospitals there. Now came our first night march, but it was only eleven miles and we reached Klip Drift at 4 a. m. The stop at that place for the day was a most uncomfortable one on account of the blistering heat and the impossibility to sleep or rest in it. Again we started, at 6 p. m., and marched all through the night reaching Paardeberg Drift on the Modder river at 6:30 a. m. on the memorable 18th February, after having covered 23 weary miles. Every one was just about dead beat and done out, but there was plenty of firing going on up the river a mile or so, and we expected soon to be called upon to take a hand in it. Breakfast, consisting of a hard tack and a cup of coffee, with a jolly good ration of rum therein, was hastily swallowed, and off we were sent up the river to a commanding kopje on the south side, from where we caught our first glimpse of Cronje's Laager. Plenty of movements of troops and firing was going on, but we were not in it yet. Presently we were ordered to cross the river down at the drift and join in the attack on the north side with the rest of our brigade, the different regiments vieing with each other as to who should be over first. We found the river very swift and breast deep, but with the aid of a cable the Engineers had stretched to keep us from being carried down stream, we plunged in, and holding on tight to the cable and to each other we all got across in good order, but soaked to the skin. I remember so vividly now poor Harry Arnold laughingly trying to stand on his head to let the water run out of his boots and pockets. We were soon all formed up, Arnold's company, "A," in front. Orders were given for the advance in extended formation, and now the value of the Belmont training displayed itself, for the extensions of company by company went on like clockwork, without a command or shout, but by signal and quietly passed word from officer to section leader and so on to the men. On we went in the direction indicated, and presently the ping of the passing bullet began to sing through the air, then as we got closer the ping turned into a sound like the crack of a whip or a pistol shot close to one's ear. Nothing of the enemy was to be seen, but to our left a battery of our artillery was getting it hot, the horses as they were hit plunging about or falling, and the officers and men working hard to limber up and out of it. They got away at last and we became the special target for the time. We lay down and fired, and advanced by rushes to do the same thing over again, until we got so close to the bush and dongas, where by this time we knew the enemy were in so great force that further advance was, without many more men, quite impossible. I should imagine it was about 10 or 10:30 o'clock. The firing line was in a sort of crescent shape, the left swung forward, and under complete control and

doing splendid work, without waste of ammunition. At places we were within 150 yards of the concealed enemy: our only cover was the ant hills, which, when large enough, form a bullet-proof shelter. And so we lay there all the long day, trying to find targets for our fire, whilst one after another curled up in the agony of wound or rolled over in the sweet sleep of death.

A long undulating kopje to our left front, subsequently called "Gun Hill," had been occupied early in the day by the Gordons and the Shropshires, together with a field battery and our maxim gun, in charge of Capt. Bell. From this commanding position they could, to a large extent, enfilade the dongas wherein were the enemy whom we were up against. The battery poured in the shrapnel, the Gordons and Shropshires, assisted by their fire and the cheerful rattle of our maxim, all helped to keep heart in us during that long day. A variation of the proceedings was caused by a terrific thunderstorm, with hail and rain, about 2 o'clock, which soaked us to the skin for the second time that day and chilled us to the marrow, but the subsequent hot sun and the excitement soon warmed us up and dried us out again.

About 4:30 o'clock word was sent up to us that the Cornwalls were going to charge the position, and when they came on our fellows went with them, but it was futile. The hackneyed expression, "hail-storm of bullets," is no exaggeration of what we were up against, so those who had not fallen lay down behind the nearest shelter and just hung on to what had been gained in that mad rush where so many had been stricken. There we lay till dark, when the work of picking up the wounded and dead commenced, and was carried on throughout the night. On Monday we changed position to Gun Hill. On Tuesday our whole brigade advanced towards the laager in a wide sweeping movement to within about 800 yards. We were under a galling rifle fire and "Pom-Pom" fire all afternoon, and retired to Gun Hill about 5 o'clock, covered by the fire of the naval guns. The bombardment of the laager went on every day and night at intervals, and it was extremely interesting to watch the effect of the big lyddite shells amongst the waggons and about the trenches.

During these days and nights our brigade, with the naval guns and a howitzer battery and some details, were the only troops on the north side of the river within touch of the laager. The Boer forces which had been collected for the relief of Cronje were constantly trying to break through the cordon which Lord Roberts had drawn so tightly around the laager, but were always driven back. Our brigade was engaged in gradually advancing a line of trenches up to within striking distance of the laager, the battalions taking up the work in succession. On Saturday, the 24th, the Royal Canadians

were ordered down to the Drift for a day's rest, but that night it rained lakes and seas, and sleep was next to impossible. The river rose rapidly, and at dawn a number of corpses, and all through the day putrid carcasses of oxen, mules, horses, sheep, goats and all such in hundreds came floating down the river from the beleaguered laager. The stench was horrible and the water putrid, but that was what we had to drink, wash in and make tea with. On Monday at noon the Royal Canadians relieved the Cornwalls in the advanced trenches, with orders to extend and enlarge them in places. That evening our brigadier told us he would like us "to make a demonstration by advancing in the dark as far as we could get and then "establish ourselves at the new point." That is the delicate way in which he invariably issued his verbal orders for any important movement. In brief, we were to advance on the laager, covering a front of 240 yards with 240 men in the front rank, with charged magazines and fixed bayonets, and 240 in the rear rank with entrenching spades and slung rifles. About 30 men of No. 7 Company, Royal Engineers, were to accompany us with sand bags and tools for making hasty entrenchments. The Gordons took our places in the trenches with orders to remain in support. The Shropshires were out on the veldt to our left with orders to volley at the laager, (distances and direction having been marked down in daylight,) so soon as our advance drew the Boer fire. At 2:30 a. m. we started, knowing that the nearest Boer trench was about 480 yards distant. It was so dark that it was necessary for each one to grasp the arm or sleeve of his next comrade to enable us to keep touch at all. We halted twice during the advance to straighten out the line and regain touch throughout. This took some little time, but when we started the third time we calculated we had covered about 400 yards of the advance. Silently we went on for a minute or so, when, of a sudden, something coming very near the popular conception of Hades opened up in front of us. The front rank fired at the blaze, not 60 yards in front of them, and the rear rank dug like fiends. It was hell for a few minutes, with the blaze of the rifles, the crack of the bullets and the agonized cries of the mortally wounded in the dark. We were able to establish ourselves in our new position, and there we hung on, rejoicing in the fact that the Shropshires were pouring volleys into the laager ahead of us, and the Gordons were supporting us. At dawn it was seen that our new trench enfiladed a large number of the Boer trenches, lining the top bank of the river. The white flag was raised at 6 a. m. General Cronje sent his formal surrender to Lord Roberts, with 4,100 prisoners. On entering the laager that morning it was found to be in such a state that the phrase, "abomination of desolation," can best describe it. Lord Roberts personally thanked the regiment on parade.

in a few aptly chosen words, besides what he said in his despatches, and Sir Henry Colvile, our Divisional Commander, and our Brigadier, Smith-Dorrien, both expressed in no measured terms their admiration and thanks for the manner in which our work had been carried through. In support of my statement, as to the necessity for training, I quote shortly from Sir Henry Colvile's despatch of 3rd March describing the action, wherein he says: "Only thoroughly well disciplined troops could have successfully kept an orderly formation in their 445 yards advance in the darkness. The coolness displayed alike by the front rank of Canadians, who remained for one-and-a-half hours in the open, covering the working party at a distance of 80 yards from the enemy's trenches, and by the rear rank and Royal Engineers in making the trench under a heavy, but fortunately ill-aimed, fire was admirable." Our brigade had no more fighting until 7th March, when, with the Highland Brigade, we advanced at 4 a. m. through the inky darkness in mass of quarter columns until dawn. Whilst marching through the darkness in that formation I could not but think of the Highland Brigade under General Wauchope marching in a similar formation towards the heights of Magersfontein. This was a very trying day as we had to march almost continuously for a stretch of about 18 miles in pursuit of the flying Dutchmen. That was the battle of Poplar Grove. The Shropshires captured a big Boer gun that day on our left at Leeuw Kopje. On the night of the 9th we crossed the Poplar Grove Drift, and on morning of the 10th the whole army started for Bloemfontein. That afternoon, after a 20 mile march, we got to Driefontein in time to be in at the fight which Kelly-Kenny, with the 6th Division and two brigades of cavalry, had been having since two o'clock. This was the last fight of any consequence before the army entered Bloemfontein on the 13th March.

On the day after the fight at Driefontein the column marched to Assvogel Kop, under very trying circumstances of terrific heat and absence of water, *as usual*, but there we found water in abundance, with a pleasant bivouacing ground. Kelly-Kenny's division, the 6th, had joined us at Driefontein and Tucker's division, the 7th, which had been moving parallel to Lord Roberts along the road via Petrusberg, also joined us at that point. The next morning, the 12th, when we all started to march at dawn, the grandest military spectacle I ever expect to see came into view in the beautiful clear atmosphere of that part of the world. The lay of the ground was such that the whole army of close on to 40,000 men could be seen moving at one time from our point of vantage, and the skirl of the pipes of the Highland Brigade and our own Cordon Highlanders could be heard in the still morning air for miles and miles. In fact, I believe the whole army marched in time to them for a while. It

reminded one forcibly of the description in "Charley O'Malley" of the opposing armies in the Peninsular War marching down to battle to the sound of bands and drums and such like before engaging in deadly combat.

On the 31st our division was suddenly ordered out at 5 a. m. to try and save the remnants of Colonel Broadwood's force, which was being so badly cut up that morning at Sanna's Post. We got there in time to get some of the prisoners the Boers had taken but not the guns, and returned to Bloemfontein on 3rd April. We had one more expedition out of Bloemfontein on 4th, 5th and 6th, with plenty of hard marching, pouring rain and no tangible results. On 21st our brigade marched out to Springfield in support of General Pole-Carew's force, which was fighting about five miles to south of us at Leeuw Kopje. On the 23rd we bivouacked on the now historic ground of Sanna's Post. On the 24th we recaptured the water-works and adjoining kopje, and on the 25th we had the fight at Israel's Poort, where Col. Otter received the wound which sent him back to hospital. General Ian Hamilton had joined Smith-Dorrien's force that morning with a large body of Mounted Infantry, and he assumed command of the whole column, with all the rest of the forces which subsequently joined it, until we got into Pretoria.

On 26th we occupied Thabanchu and remained in that neighbourhood doing a bit of fighting day and night, and getting occasionally well shelled, until the early morning of the 30th, when the whole force moved out towards Hout Nek. Our mounted troops came into touch with the Boers in a very strong position on some high kopjes about 10 a. m., and then the trouble commenced. Our brigade was the only infantry with the force. The Cornwalls were protecting the transport in rear, the Canadians were in support and escort for the guns, and the Shropshires were to attack the right front, and the Gordons a high kopje called Tobah Mountain, on our left front. The first thing of moment that happened the Infantry was that the Cornwalls and transport, 2 miles in rear, suddenly found shells from a Long Tom dropping with persistent accuracy at in among them. Finally, however, they got out of range, when a Long Tom commenced to pay attention to the Canadians and the guns, this fire coming from our right rear. Meantime the Gordons required help in their attack on Tobah, and 2 companies of the Canadians were sent. Yet again 2 more companies; yet again, 2 more, and finally the last two. All these had to cross a fire zone directly enfiladed by two large Boer guns on our right at about 2000 yards range, and it was not a pleasant job either. It was whilst doing this poor Harry Cotton met his soldier's death. As soon as across this zone rifle fire met us from the right front: then we had to climb the precipitous face of the



kopje about 350 feet, and hang on to the top edge under a sniping rifle fire all night long without food, water, blankets or coats to keep out the biting cold. In the morning the Canadians and Gordons cleared the kopje, and by 11 o'clock we had complete possession of it, but we got no food worth speaking of till 7 that evening, our last meal having been at 4 the previous morning. The next day we had a well earned rest at Jacobsrust, when, with the addition of more troops, the column was re-formed, to be known as the "Winburg Column." It now consisted of the 19th Brigade, the 21st, Major-Gen. Bruce Hamilton's Brigade, the Highland Brigade, 1 brigade of cavalry, 4 corps of mounted infantry, 2 horse artillery batteries, 5 field batteries, 4 5-in. and 2 4.7 inch guns, sometimes known as the "Royal Ox Artillery," or more familiarly as "Cow Guns," for the reason that they were drawn by oxen, all under command of General Ian Hamilton, with Smith-Dorrien as his right hand man. A team that could not be beaten, and they never were.

We had a half day's fighting on the 4th May at Welkom, but it was mostly an artillery duel, and we captured Winburg on the 5th, where the first and only draft for the Canadians reached us after a hard chase from Bloemfontein. Gen. Ian Hamilton on this day issued the following order, which sets out so clearly the work done since we left Bloemfontein:—

"SPECIAL ORDER BY G. O. C. WINBURG COLUMN, 5TH MAY, 1900.

During the past 13 days a portion of the Winburg column has "marched over 100 miles, fighting the enemy on nine separate occasions, and capturing two important towns.

"The other portion of the column has borne at least its full share "in the very successful operations which have followed upon the "battle of Hout Neck. The G. O. C. cannot therefore but feel that "his column has earned not only the praises of the Field Marshal "Commanding-in-Chief, which are published separately, but also a day "or two's comparative rest. In the same message, however, in which "Lord Roberts expresses his high appreciation of the successes we "have achieved, he directs us not to slacken our efforts for several "days to come. The enemy is hurrying northwards to concentrate, "and it is of nothing less than national importance that his move- "ments should be impeded and his guns and convoys if possible cap- "tured. Thanks to the good work which has already been accom- "plished the column now finds itself better placed to carry out the "Field Marshal Commanding-in-Chief's wishes than any other por- "tion of the troops under his command. The opportunity is a great "one and General Ian Hamilton confidently appeals to the officers

"and men of the Winburg column to make the very best of it, regardless of the fatigues and privation which will probably have to be undergone before success is secured.

(Signed) J. LYTTLETON, Lt.-Col.

A. A. G.

"Winburg,

"5, 5, 1900.

"The G. O. C. Winburg Column has much pleasure in informing the troops under his command that he has received a telegram from the Field Marshal Commanding-in-Chief in S. A., in which Lord Roberts expresses his high appreciation of the work recently performed by all ranks in the Winburg Column. His Lordship has yet to hear of the further success achieved by the capture of Winburg.

By order,

(Signed) J. LYTTLETON, Lt.-Col.,

A. A. G."

The column moved out of Winburg on Sunday evening, 6th May at 5 o'clock, and on the afternoon of the 9th reached Bloemphats, a fine farm on the banks of the Zand River. Here the springbok, blesbok and hartbeest were in great numbers, and so bewildered at the influx of such a large number of men and horses that they at times came rushing through our bivouac with disaster to themselves but with pleasure to us, and a gratifying addition to our somewhat scanty food supply. The Boer army was entrenched on a long line of kopjes on the north side of the river, and at 5:30 next morning our force started out to tackle them. It was a difficult job, but by 2 p.m. they had been dislodged all along the line. On this day, especially, our "Cow Guns" made most magnificent practice, knocking the Boer guns out in every case in short order. The first shot from one of our 5-inch guns knocked over a Boer "Pom-Pom" at a range of 6,000 yards, destroying it and killing three who were serving it, one of them being an officer of the German army. The Royal Canadians had 4 companies on escort for the big guns throughout the day, but the other 4, numbering less than 200 all told, were given the task of holding the right flank against an attempted turning movement of the enemy. It was a trying position, as the fire was very hot and continuous, and there was little cover, but we succeeded, and found out afterwards that over 1,000 Dutchmen had been trying to drive us back from early morning till after one o'clock in the afternoon.

Generals Ian Hamilton and Smith Dorrien both expressed their thanks and high approbation of what they were pleased to call the gallant conduct of the Canadians that day, and Gen. Ian Hamilton

said: "I wish I had a few hundred more Canadians." Ventersburg was occupied on the 11th and Kroonstad on the 13th. Next day we were delighted to have a visit from brother Canadians of the Dragoons and Mounted Rifles, the first time we had met since their arrival in Africa. We left Kroonstad on the 15th, and on 18th the advanced portion of the column occupied Lindley, whilst our brigade, with some details, had some little fighting in the neighbourhood. It was at Lindley that our much esteemed friend, General De Wet, first offered to surrender, with 1,000 men, to General Ian Hamilton, but the offer being "on condition" it was promptly declined. On our way to Heilbron, which we captured on the 22nd, we had more or less "scrapping," the enemy hanging about our flanks and rear all the time, but always avoiding a general engagement at our front. On the 26th May Colonel Otter rejoined from hospital, having been away from the battalion 31 days. That afternoon the column crossed the Vaal River, entering upon Oom Paul's own territory. The Royal Canadians had the distinction to be the first British Infantry Regiment to cross the river in this war. On the 28th our brigade was in reserve, whilst Lord Roberts' main column was having some heavy fighting at Klipriviersberg. We expected to be called upon to make a turning movement on the left, but Gen. French, with the mounted division, succeeded in doing this unassisted, except by our support. On the 29th we first came within sight of the tall chimneys of the Rand Mines near Johannesburg. The Boer positions were found to be at Doornkop, the historic position where Dr. Jameson made his last stand in the eventful raid. General Ian Hamilton's whole force was to dislodge them. Whilst the mounted troops of our column made a very wide sweeping movement to our left the 21st Brigade was to turn the Boer right, our Brigade was to make the frontal attack on the position, which was 2,900 yards distant. The Gordons and Canadians were to attack, the Cornwalls in support and the Shropshires in reserve. The ground between us and the enemy was almost without cover of any sort, nearly smooth and gradually sloping upwards towards the enemy, who occupied a long ridge of rocks at its summit, with several Krupp 40-pounders to assist them. The low afternoon winter sun was shining in our eyes, making it difficult to see ahead, and the enemy had set the veldt grass on fire to make it more uncomfortable for us and to leave the ground over which we had to pass a dead black, thus showing us up in our khaki kit in fine shape as targets. The Gordons and Canadians extended at an interval of 10 to 12 paces, and advanced through the smoke and fire of the burning grass and came on to the dead black ground. The 74th Field Battery, under Major McLeod, commenced to pour shrapnel into the Dutchmen at 2,500 yards, as

we advanced, but finding their fire at that range not so effective as might be, the battery limbered up and boldly galloped straight forward to within 1,600 yards of the position: as soon as we got that far, they came again into action, notwithstanding the hot shell and rifle fire being about them, and with rapid fire poured such a hailstorm of shrapnel into and about the Boer 40-pounders that they were very shortly withdrawn. This action of Major McLeod's battery was the smartest and most gallant piece of work on the part of a field battery I saw during the campaign. It materially aided the infantry attack, which was driven home as soon as the turning movement of the 21st Brigade had developed. The Gordons and Canadians together rushed the position, and at 5 o'clock we were in full possession. On the 1st June our force bivouacked close to Johannesburg, and on the 2nd we visited the city. Next morning we were off again for Pretoria with Lord Roberts' main column on our right. We had a stiffish fight on the afternoon of the 4th, and on the afternoon of the 5th the whole army marched in triumph through the streets of the Transvaal capital and passed in review before "Little Bobs." As the Royal Canadians came along the band struck up that old familiar air, "The Boys of the Old Brigade," and we went by with a swing that drew applause from the assembled crowd of Pretorians. On this day our beloved Brigadier, Smith-Dorrien, issued the following order, which describes in brief the achievements of the fighting 19th up to that date:—

"The 19th Brigade has achieved a record of which any infantry might be proud. Since the date it was formed, 12,200, it has marched 620 miles, often on half rations, seldom on full.

"It has taken part in the capture of ten towns, fought in ten general actions, and on 27 other days. In one period of 30 days it fought on 21 of them and marched 327 miles.

"Casualties, between 400 and 500.

"Defeats, nil."

It was expected that General Ian Hamilton's column would be dissolved, and a new force got together for him after the occupation of Pretoria, and this came to pass, but Lord Roberts in his Army Order of that time, stated in regard to the work accomplished by that force: "The column under Lieut.-General Ian Hamilton marched 400 miles in 45 days, including 10 days' halt. It was engaged with the enemy 28 times."

It was now reported that our brigade was to be broken up, the Gordons and Royal Canadians remaining to garrison Pretoria for a while, and so some of us looked forward with satisfaction to a bit of a rest for a while. But this was not to be, for at noon on the 7th June we got orders to trek south on the Standerton road at 2:30

p. m., and off we started again, the Suffolks taking the place of the Shropshires in the brigade. Eventually the whole brigade was placed on the line of communications between Pretoria and Vereeniging, the Royal Canadians having 1 company on the armoured train, 1 at Boksburg and the remainder at Springs, where there were several alarms and one attack by the hovering Boers on a foggy morning, which was repulsed without much trouble. The old 19th Brigade was never brought together again, although our chums, the Gordons, came out to Springs and gave us a hand on several occasions of threatened attack. Up to the time the Royal Canadians occupied Springs they had trekked an actual distance from point to point since leaving Graspan of 744 miles. Subsequently the battalion trekked on a fruitless chase after that "will o' the wisp," Christian De Wet, a further distance of about 250 miles, making a total of about 1000 miles marched in six months, not counting manœuvring on fighting days, which frequently amounted to many miles. That is a record no one need be ashamed of.

A lesson to be learned from that campaign is this: If Canada is to go on furnishing troops as these were, and as undoubtedly she will, it is absolutely necessary that some provision should be made for maintaining each regiment at something like its numerical strength in the field. The wastage through wounds and sickness in a hard campaign is enormous, and if drafts of fresh men are not continuously received the regiment soon drops down to such small numbers that it becomes an inefficient unit in a brigade, and is thrown out to do line of communication duty or something of that kind. At the time Lord Roberts inspected the Royal Canadian Regiment at Kroonstadt on the 14th May, out of a total of 1,140 who left Canada there were only present on parade 415. That shows you the wastage that takes place, and in future arrangements should be made to provide for this and keep our ranks comparatively full all the time.

Another lesson to be learnt from this war of immense distances and scattered formation, is the necessity for a large number of thoroughly trained signallers with every corps or unit. I am not aware how the Royal Canadian Dragoons and Mounted Rifles and the Canadian Field Artillery were equipped in this respect, but I know that the Royal Canadian Regiment was very much, and at times very seriously, handicapped from want of a sufficient number of trained signallers. Not merely men who could do the ordinary flag-wagging, but men who could send and receive helio messages by day and lantern messages by night. At out-stations we invariably had to requisition for men and instruments from the Imperial troops for the purpose, and at times also to help us with ordinary flag-waggers.



A proper and thoroughly equipped school of signalling is a much needed adjunct to the efficient training of the whole of the Canadian Militia.

A more important lesson to be learned from this campaign, in fact the most important of all, to my mind, is this: The absolute necessity of every officer, N. C. officer and man, being trained before he takes the field, to be a thoroughly practical rifle shot. I mean by practical, one who can judge distance, can fire accurately and quickly at either stationary or moving objects, and who in the excitement of battle remains cool enough to make effective use of his rifle under all circumstances: in fact, who is so accustomed to its use that there is no chance of what is sometimes called "buck fever" getting hold of him. On service now-a-days every officer carries a rifle, and he ought to be able to find out ranges, distances and objects with his own rifle, and so put his men on to any good thing there may be to have a crack at. I see by a recent Army Order, "all officers gazetted to the cavalry and infantry will be required to qualify at a school of musketry before promotion to the rank of captain." The sooner that order is made law for the Canadian forces, and the means of qualification provided, the better for us. Permit me, before closing, to quote a letter I have just received from a very distinguished Imperial officer, in which some reference is made to the general character of the work done by Canadians in the war, and which, I think, perhaps you would like to hear:—

" FARM HOUSE, CLYNDE, NR. LEWES,  
Jan. 11th, 1902.

" DEAR COLONEL BUCHAN,—

" Pray thank the officers of the Regiment for their kindness in sending me so interesting a Xmas Card. All Canadians should now be very proud indeed of the great services their men have rendered to the Empire in South Africa. I am told by men whose opinion I would take upon such a point in preference to all others, that no men have shown greater military aptitude and genius during this war than the Canadian troops with whom it was my privilege many years ago to be intimately associated.

" Believe me to be, very truly, yours,

(Signed) WOLSELEY."

I thank you, Mr. Chairman and gentlemen, for the patient hearing you have given to my somewhat lengthy remarks.